

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Education Committee



SB 1095: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

IN FAVOR OF SB 1095

February 20, 2023

Dear Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Currey:

My name is Fernecia Smith and I am a Justice Advisor at the [Connecticut Justice Alliance](#) (CTJA) and I'm writing this testimony to communicate my strong support for SB 1095 An Act Concerning School Resource Officers.

The CTJA is a statewide youth-adult partnership working to end the criminalization of youth. The Alliance includes Justice Staff, Justice Advisors, and Steering Committee members, which includes lawyers, researchers, clinicians, and social workers, who work across issues in areas such as mental/behavioral health, family advocacy, substance abuse, youth services, LGBTQ+ issues, legal representation, education, community and residential services, and public policy reform.

While I write this in support of SB 1095, I'd like to start by bringing attention to Section 1 (3) which states that the memorandum of understanding shall include a graduated response model for student discipline. I urge you to reconsider this. One of the many issues with the implementation of SROs is that they're expected to carry out roles that are not and should not be the responsibility of an officer to carry out. In fact, during conversations with current SROs, it was not uncommon to hear that they 1) did not know the actual responsibilities included in their role, 2) felt that they wore too many hats, and/or 3) believed their role was to discipline. If and only if SROs are to be used in schools, one would assume that, similar to their colleagues who do not work in schools, their role would be to serve and protect the school. By this, I mean to serve and protect the school from potential outside sources of danger entering. When we begin to expect more out of their role, that's when we run into problems. They may be given a different title while in the school building, but we cannot disregard the fact that at the end of the day, they are law enforcement. They are police officers. An officer's job is not to discipline school children, nor is it to intervene when tensions are high between classmates and/or when a teacher believes a student is being disruptive in class. When SROs are expected to handle these sorts of roles, that's when problems arise. That's when we begin to see patterns of irrational thinking and anger/frustration geared responses to problems that would have much better solutions if people in proper roles were expected to and allowed to handle them.

When discussing SROs, the initial response that seems to be most common is that if we get rid of SROs then our children's safety will be at risk. This is untrue. Studies have shown that SROs actually do not increase safety levels, and having them present does not necessarily mean that they

prevent incidents from happening. But their presence has been proven to contribute to an increase in certain things, such as funneling more children into the legal system. While SROs may not look or act the same in all schools, the schools in urban, low-income cities are the ones that have the most negative experiences and are most impacted by them. They also tend to be the schools that have some of the most SROs present.

For these reasons, and countless others, I strongly encourage the removal of SROs from schools. However, it's important to note that I understand you cannot simply remove something that was initially put in place to serve a purpose without offering an alternative to it. Instead of SROs, our children and their schools would benefit from having credible messengers and behavioral technicians, and other knowledgeable people who are properly trained and specialize in the various areas of concern that SROs simply would not and do not have the capability to handle. They would already have personal connections to the children, or be able to form those much needed connections without much pushback because they look like them, come from where they come from, and have a better understanding of how things are in their "world." They'd be able to intervene when an issue arises and handle the situation without needing to involve law enforcement, unless absolutely necessary. This would significantly decrease the amount of children arrested and generate a more positive school environment.

Thank you for your time,

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